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SUBJECT: PANDORA 2006: MOCK BIRD FLU PANDEMIC RESPONSE EXERCISE

¶1. (U) Summary: GOE is in the process of wrapping up PANDORA 2006, a multi-stage program created to test how Estonia's crisis management systems would respond to a bird flu pandemic. The program is being used as a learning tool to highlight some of the GOE's crisis management strengths and weaknesses. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On October 3 poleconoffs and conoff, along with approximately 60 Estonian and international observers, attended a portion of the Estonian Ministry of the Interior's (MOI) national civil protection exercise PANDORA 2006, which was designed to test Estonia's ability to respond to a bird flu pandemic. The exercise was fully planned and financed by the GOE at a cost of 34,000 Euros. The morning portion of the observer program took place at Tallinn International Airport and involved a scenario in which an arriving plane carried several passengers exhibiting flu-like symptoms. During an afternoon session, PANDORA 2006 organizer Kevin Probert-Ehaver gave a presentation discussing the structure and planning of the exercise.

¶3. (U) Under Estonia's Emergency Preparedness Law of 2000, a national crisis management exercise must be organized by the MOI at least once every four years. The last exercise, held in 2002, focused on natural and industrial disasters. PANDORA 2006 was comprised of a series of four thematically interrelated flu outbreak exercises held over the course of several days. Part one, held in February in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, was designed to test Estonia's response to a mock domestic poultry-based flu outbreak. In October, the second part of the exercise involved the Ministry of Justice in a mock outbreak of a human strain of the flu at a Tallinn prison. Part three, the observer portion of the program, involved the Ministry of Social Affairs and Tallinn International Airport. Part four was a hospital-based Tallinn-wide pandemic scenario. These practical exercises will be followed by a multi-agency government cabinet meeting, an evaluation conference, and finally a wrap-up session on November 1.

¶4. (U) In an effort to more accurately simulate a real life situation, the airport observer exercise was not announced to emergency personnel in advance. The exercise was executed as planned, with some minor glitches. For example, ambulances and medical staff in protective gear arrived to the scene approximately 40 minutes after being notified; the exercise schedule anticipated a 10 minute response time. During the afternoon discussion session, Probert-Ehaver noted that problem areas were being identified and worked out during each of the exercise scenarios. A British observer inquired as to whether the Ministry of Social Affairs has the leadership capability to handle a bird flu outbreak, as Britian's equivalent ministry proved itself unprepared to lead during their foot and mouth epidemic. Probert-Ehaver explained that in a real life crisis, the nature of the emergency would determine which ministry would take the lead. For a health

problem such as a human outbreak of bird flu, the Ministry of Social Affairs would be primarily responsible because it controls the funding for health-related crises. However, the MOI and/or the Ministry of Defense would be responsible for coordinating plans. (Note: the MOI's crisis management section is made up of only four people. End note) Probert-Ehaver stated that these and other issues will be further discussed during the wrap up portion of PANDORA 2006, as well as in ongoing cross-ministry crisis management meetings.

15. (SBU) Comment. While there are problems to be worked out in Estonia's crisis management response system, it is encouraging to see Estonia taking the lead on crisis planning and not relying solely on friendly countries for assistance, as was the case of the oil spills last spring when Estonia found itself unprepared and dependent on Finland for emergency clean up. In a situation like a bird

flu epidemic, it is vital that Estonia be prepared to step up and control an outbreak internally as other countries may be dealing with their own outbreaks. PANDORA 2006 demonstrates that GOE is aware of this reality and is taking preparatory steps in the right direction. End Comment.

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